

*** NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA ***
For the week of December 22, 1997

This issue, we delve into the world of using the Internet to buy and sell stuff. You can use the Net to post and read classified ads just like in the newspaper, or you can buy and sell items with an online auction.

=*=*= INTERNET CLASSIFIEDS AND AUCTIONS =*=*=

Somebody wants your stuff. It may be hard to believe as you stare at the pile of junk in your garage or attic, but someone, somewhere, wants it. As they say, one man's trash is another's treasure. The only problem is finding him. Sure, you could put an ad in the local paper, but what are the chances that someone in your town wants that old exercise equipment, that Barbie collection and your rusty Pinto? The Internet can help you look beyond the scope of the local newspaper. In fact, the Net is home to a variety of web sites and newsgroups that you can use to sell your stuff.

On the other hand, if you want to buy things, you're in for a treat. You can use these same sites to find someone who's selling just about anything you can imagine: used computers, antiques and collectibles, furniture... even an old rusty Pinto. If you're a collector, these sites will forever change the way you search for whatever it is you collect. If you're searching for a used cellular phone or out-of-print book, you'll find them just as useful.

-.-. Classified Web Sites -.-.-

To start your expedition, point your web browser to one of the sites that specialize in classified advertisements. Several excellent (and free!) sites are out there, where you can browse ads to find stuff to buy, or post ads to find buyers for your stuff. These web sites generally offer ads from a wider geographic area (and consequently, more ads) than your local newspaper's classified section can. That's a good thing if you're buying Beanie Babies, but probably not so useful if you're in the market for a car.

Yahoo! Classifieds (<http://classifieds.yahoo.com>) and Classifieds2000 (<http://www.classifieds2000.com>) are both excellent ad sites that are worthy of your visit. Classifieds2000 is huge, offering more than 1.5 million listings. You can buy and sell vehicles, computers, general merchandise, even real estate. A welcome feature automatically e-mails you when new listings matching your criteria are posted.

Similarly, Yahoo's site lets you browse by categories and also lets you limit your search by geographic area: if you're looking for a Harley in West Palm Beach, it shouldn't be a problem.

It's not all just used PCs and free puppies -- both sites also offer personal ads and employment listings. With so many ads, a search function would be nice. Classifieds2000 offers one. Yahoo! Classifieds does too, but I've never gotten it to work. Also remember, although each these sites offers thousands or even millions of ads, each online classified service is a microcosm of its own -- there's no good way to search several classified sites at once for a rare item or the best price.

Some newspapers are using the Internet to enhance their offerings. Yet another remarkable classified site is Recycler Classifieds, created by the folks who publish the Recycler newspapers. (If you haven't seen it, Recycler is a thick paper that's nothing but ads.) Their site lets you search 170,000 ads in categories including music, sports & hobbies and antiques. As with the other classified sites, browsing and posting ads are free. If you post an ad and there's an edition of the Recycler paper in your area, your ad will appear in print as well as online. (<http://www.recycler.com/>)

CompuServe has its own classified ad troves as well, which you can access at keyword CLASSIFIED. There are two different areas: CompuServe Classifieds (which works within CIM and with the text interface) and Global Classifieds (which requires a web browser and is an arm of the Classifieds2000 web site.)

-.-.- Newsgroups -.-.-

Usenet newsgroups are the Internet's oldest system for classifieds. In fact, using Usenet is most like posting a traditional classified ad in the newspaper: you write your ad, choose the section that best fits it, send it in and wait for any bites. The vast majority of the classified newsgroups are in the "misc.forsale" hierarchy. If you're buying or selling computer items, you're in luck -- there are more than two dozen computer-related newsgroups, such as `misc.forsale.computers.mac-specific.cards.video` and `misc.forsale.computers.storage`. But there's only one newsgroup for non-computer items -- `misc.forsale.non-computer` -- which lumps together ads for everything from motorcycles to lumber. If you're in the market for something that doesn't have a disk drive, stick with the web classifieds and online auctions.

-.-.- Auctions -.-.-

Another favorite way to buy and sell treasures is using Web auctions. An auction allows you to put your items up for bid, where other Internet users can read about and bid for them. Auctions typically take place over several days, giving bidders plenty of time to fight over the value of your autographed Cheryl Ladd posters. With an auction, you have less control over the price that your goodies ultimately sell for (although you can set a minimum price). Then again, you might get more money than you counted on, and you don't have to deal with finding a buyer: the auction site does the work for you (unless, of course, no one bids your minimum price).

Buying auction items is just plain fun. After you've browsed the categories -- which list computers, clothing, comics and everything in between -- and found an item that you want, you can bid on it by telling the site the maximum amount you're willing to pay. If your bid is higher than the current highest maximum, you're the new leader. That is, until someone outbids you... or until the auction ends, in which case you win the auction.

There are several auction sites on the web. My two favorites are EBay (www.ebay.com) and Onsale Exchange (<http://www.onsale.com/exchange.htm>). EBay has been around for many moons, and has all sorts of useful features for buyers and sellers. It's also very popular -- having so many other bidders around is generally good for sellers and bad for buyers. Onsale Exchange is relatively new,

well-organized, and a little less traveled, but lacks some of the features that long-standing Ebay has had time to develop.

Most auction sites charge the seller a small fee for each item sold. Generally auction sites charge an insertion fee (a nominal fee for listing an item) plus a small percentage of the final sale price. Ebay does it this way; selling items at Onsale is currently free although they plan to start charging in this manner soon. Although it's not as cheap as just posting an ad to Usenet, selling items via auction is less work and a good value.

It is a whole lot of fun to participate in an online auction, and it's also a blast just to browse the aisles and aisles of weird stuff that folks have for sale. But remember: participating in an online auction is like visiting a Las Vegas casino: never bid more than you can afford to lose.

-.-.- Don't Get Swindled -.-.-

It doesn't matter if you plan to buy or sell, it doesn't matter if you use newsgroups, auctions or the web -- when you're doing business with strangers on the Net, you should take precautions to protect yourself. Take the time to read the Usenet Marketplace FAQ at <http://www.phoenix.net/~lildan/FAQ/>. Focused on newsgroups but rife with good tips for online selling in general, this FAQ provides pointers on writing an effective advertisement and tips on making sure you don't get swindled.

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Yahoo Classifieds: <http://classifieds.yahoo.com>
Classifieds2000: <http://www.classifieds2000.com>
Recycler Classifieds: <http://www.recycler.com>
Classifieds on CompuServe: GO CLASSIFIED

Ebay: <http://www.ebay.com>
Onsale Exchange: <http://www.onsale.com/exchange.htm>

Usenet Marketplace FAQ: <http://www.phoenix.net/~lildan/FAQ/>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet Community Forum -- GO INETCOM and look in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

Got comments or ideas for future newsletter issues? We want to hear 'em. Just send a message to savetz@compuserve.com.

Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer had a very shiny nose. And if you ever saw it, you would even say it was copyright 1997 by Kevin Savetz.